MAY 2017

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THE MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

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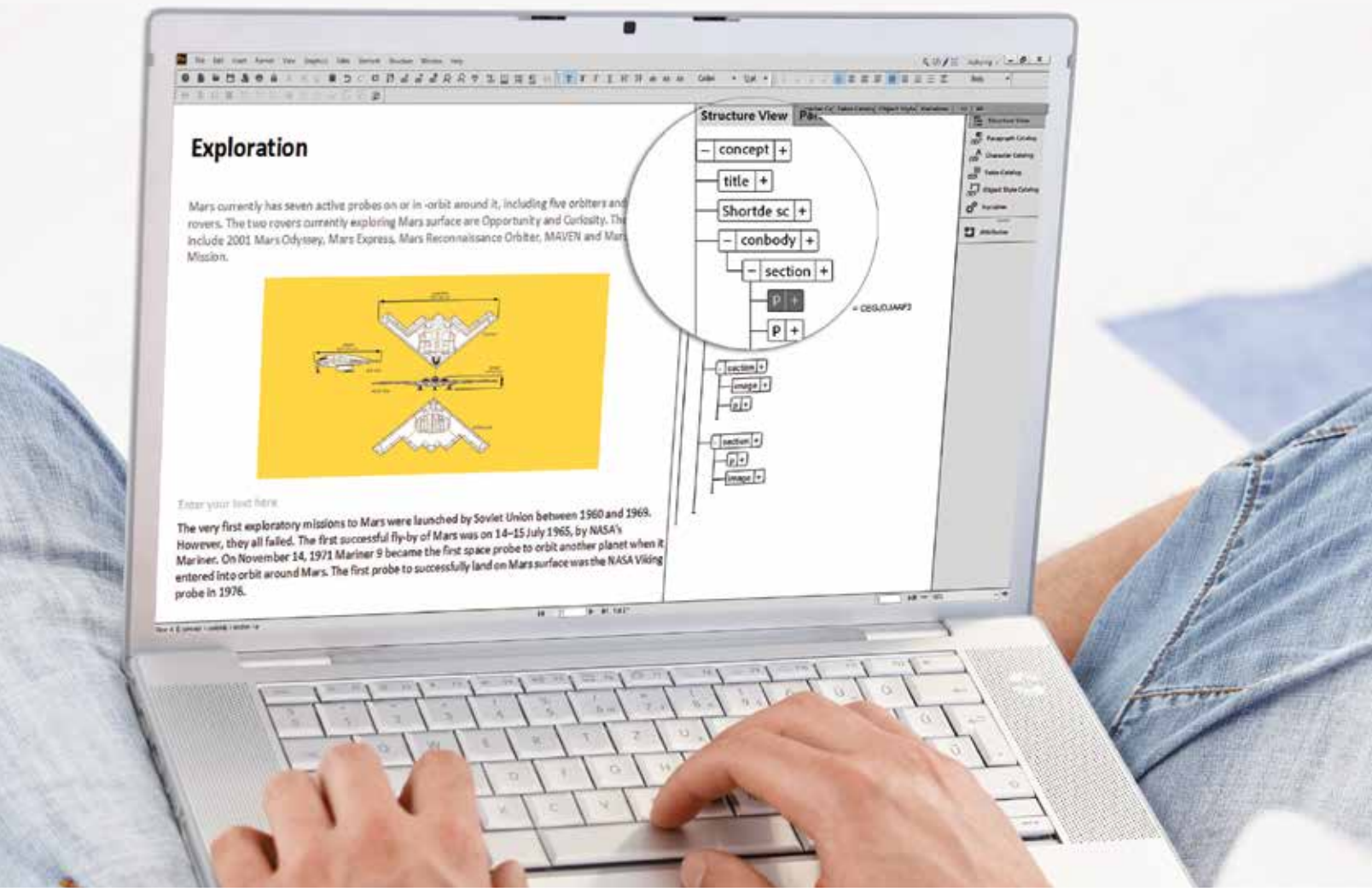
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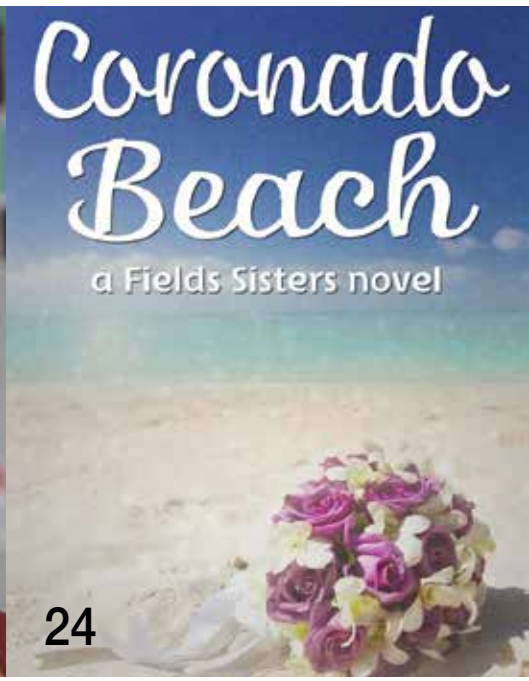

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A Note from the Editor

THE ARTICLES IN the May issue of *Intercom* all center on career advice—something we all need reminding of from time to time, even if we are considered experts.

Are you looking for a job? Richard Rabil Jr., provides practical advice to technical communication job seekers about how to make your applications stand out among the competition, based on stories and patterns he observed during his time as a technical communication hiring manager. It includes some excellent tips that will help your resume and your personal brand, such as using effective visual design, tailoring your resume, highlighting your business value, and submitting competitive writing samples.

Are you a writer-editor working with subject matter experts? Lindsey Neely addresses this timeless issue with some proven strategies that have worked for her, including taking the communication initiative.

Are you an instructor teaching tech comm students who will enter the global workplace? Tiffany Price has written an article about adjusting pedagogies to address both the history of education, plain language, and future technology. And in the columns section, Kirk St.Amant has written an installment of Writing Locally, Communicating Globally titled "Context, Culture, and Usability." In the column, he introduces the concept of schemas to help technical communicators map cultural context in ways that provide insights on usability expectations in different cultures.

Do you wonder how you could better serve your profession and thereby your fellow colleagues? STC Fellow Larry Kunz offers encouragement and sage advice in his remarks delivered at the 50th anniversary celebration of the STC Carolina Chapter. He recommends working together toward mutual support and sharing knowledge and serving the truth.

Have you wondered how to make your content more influential? Scott Abel interviews Colleen Jones, author and owner of Content Science, to discuss how psychology, persuasion, and neuroscience play important roles in making content influential.

Do you want to balance your creative writing and your tech comm skills? Andrea Wendger has done it—by writing about her creative fiction in Off Hours.

I hope you enjoy this edition of *Intercom* as much as I enjoyed editing it, and I wish all readers the very best in their tech comm pursuits.

—Liz Pohland
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intercom

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How to Be an Amazing Tech Comm Job Applicant:

TIPS FROM A TECH COMM HIRING MANAGER

By RICHARD RABIL JR.

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I'LL NEVER FORGET the two-line email reply that my team received from a technical communication job applicant who was expressing disappointment over his rejection: "You must be joking. How many other candidates have a PhD earned under a Nobel laureate?"

Ironically, the message only reinforced our decision to keep searching. Being a technical communicator requires humility, not least because we must regularly receive honest criticism of our work. It is therefore highly suspect whenever an applicant exhibits signs of an ego.

So what are the qualities that an amazing technical communication job applicant *should* exhibit? That was the burning question on my mind when I became an interim hiring manager a few years ago. Faced with the difficult task of finding five high-quality technical writers as soon as possible, my team and I reviewed over a hundred resumes and LinkedIn profiles, performed countless interviews, and evaluated a huge collection of writing samples and homework assignments. It took us about eight months to fill all our positions.

Based on that experience, this article presents some practical tips for how technical communication job seekers can shine in four key areas: visual design, a well-tailored resume, accomplishments, and writing samples. The most competitive applicants, we found, were the ones who maintained a cohesive level of quality across these categories.

Capitalizing on Visual Design

If you can make your application package clean, well-organized, and visually appealing, you will quickly distinguish yourself from most technical communication candidates.

That's not to say that shiny design is a substitute for effective writing or strong professional experience. It's not your job as a writer to demonstrate that you have incredible artistic talent. Nevertheless, showing a firm grasp of basic design principles—balance, alignment, grouping, consistency, and so on—is critical for at least two reasons.

Reason 1: The impression it makes. Recruiters and hiring managers open hundreds of documents in the evaluation process, and you can be sure that they feel a thrill in their hearts when the first thing they see is pleasing to the eye. When I opened a document that was clean, polished, and well-organized, I delved into the details with a positive bias before even reading a single word. Conversely, I went in with a negative bias when the document was ugly, inconsistent, and cluttered.

This is hardly a new idea. In his article "Supra-Textual Design: The Visual Rhetoric of Whole Documents," Charles Kostelnick (1996) argued that, "Attention to the visual rhetoric of the document must extend to the whole document—its global framework—not only its internal workings" (10). In other words, the more you build a cohesive design throughout your documentation—from the outer elements that readers first encounter, to the minute details inside—the more control you will have over achieving the outcomes you want.

Reason 2: The competency it demonstrates. As shown in the March 2017 issue of *Intercom*, visual communication is as much a core competency of technical communicators as written communication. The best job applications we received exhibited a fusion of these skills.

This doesn't mean you must become a design maestro capable of wielding Adobe InDesign, but it does mean making smart design choices. Most candidates we evaluated could have made simple changes to outshine the competition: avoiding underlines, showing better contrast between headings, converting dense paragraphs to concise lists, and adjusting margins and line spacing. And we certainly did not have anything against the use of glossy resume templates so long as the applicant could demonstrate their visual communication abilities in other ways, such as in their homework or writing samples.

For ideas on simple design techniques to use, see "Checklist for the Ideal Technical Communications Resume," written by Synergistech, a company with extensive experience recruiting technical writers in the San Francisco Bay Area. The checklist includes tips on alignment, tabs, spacing, and other such aspects. For more details, also read Jamie Gillenwater's article on visual communication in the March 2017 issue of *Intercom*.

Tailoring Your Resume

After we got past the initial visual impression of a resume, the most common issue we observed was the failure to tailor the language in the resume and cover letter to the position.

For example, one of our applicants used anagrams in her resume to spell attributes like ROCKSTAR, LEADER, and BUDGET in her job history description. The technique was a little over the top, but the even bigger problem was that none of the descriptions had anything to do with technical writing or the job qualifications we had listed.

Perhaps even more surprising, we received applications from experienced technical communicators who failed to demonstrate competence with the techniques that we explicitly identified. Instead, we received long-winded descriptions of tasks that could have been summarized or omitted in favor of ones more closely aligned with our requirements.

The first step I would recommend in this area is to quickly review the standard elements of the ideal technical communication resume. Synergistech has a useful (and free) online resource called "The Ideal Technical Communications Resume" that directly addresses this point.

The next step is to tailor your resume to make it as easy as possible for a hiring manager, who is already inundated with hundreds of documents, to quickly and easily map your skills to their explicit needs. While this is stated so often that it borders on cliché, half of our candidates failed to adhere to it.

To get a more concrete idea of the tailoring process, consider a job description that lists the following:

- Work closely with other members of the documentation team to ensure uniformity in workflow and writing style
- Demonstrate content strategy experience, including experience defining metadata
- Use single-source publishing tools to create print and online documentation

In responding to these requirements, you should update the pertinent sections of your professional experience to describe where and how you performed similar duties. Incorporate keywords and phrases like "content strategy," "defining metadata," and "single-source publishing" (assuming you can claim such experience) into your descriptions, and then place them in a prominent location.

The complement to this process is to *ruthlessly* omit extraneous details. For instance, you can cut that story

about how you analyzed multiple authoring tools to select the right one, or how you attended daily Agile meetings to "understand product market need" (whatever that means), or how you captured images with SnagIt. This is ancillary information that you can mention in the interview process if necessary. Ideally, you could fit your content on one page, though it is acceptable to go longer provided you highlight the most relevant information and emphasize the business value you delivered.

But what if you lack some of the skills shown in the job listing? We had quite a few applicants in this situation. My advice here is simple: don't count yourself out just because you can't fill every box. We never expected a complete match, and if you can show how you meet at least half or more of the criteria, you will still likely be considered. A few practical strategies for filling in the gaps are to invest in your own learning, volunteer for a writing project, obtain a certification, or use the cover letter to explain what skills you have to compensate. For a more in-depth discussion on this question, see Synergistech's "Getting Experience When You Have None: Escaping the Catch 22."

Emphasizing Your Accomplishments

I would be willing to bet that if you have ever searched for job advice from a recruiter or career counselor, you have probably heard something like the following: rather than include vague, squishy phrases about what a "hard-working team player" you are, describe concrete accomplishments or outcomes that you achieved in your previous jobs.

This is accurate advice, and the more specific and quantitative you are, the more powerful your resume will be. But even if you cannot be quantitative, a qualitative statement is better than none. Below are a few examples geared specifically toward technical communicators.

Category	Sample Description
Quality	Revised a series of ten user guides to improve clarity, simplify organization, and reduce length by 50 pages overall.
Time and Cost Savings	Wrote over 100 new articles in the product knowledge base that preemptively answered user questions and saved subject matter experts valuable time. Created page templates and a content reuse strategy that accelerated the authoring process, reduced the cost of maintenance, and simplified ongoing updates.
Organization	Consolidated disparate guides residing in separate wiki spaces into a single wiki space, saving users time and frustration in their searches.
Accuracy and Maintenance	Archived 100+ pages of outdated wiki content that was causing confusion and customer complaints.

Be prepared to summarize these kinds of accomplishments in your resume and interviews. Think of them as before-and-after stories about how you solved a communication problem and added value to the organization. My team and I were intensely interested in stories like that because we often have to justify our strategies and decisions in terms of their value to the business. (At the same time, while you always want to put your awesome talent on full display, avoid exaggeration. Hiring managers have ways of discovering how truthful you were.)

Submitting High-Quality Writing Samples

Writing samples are a critical component of the application process, and in general my team was interested in samples that demonstrated two things: (1) the ability to communicate complex technical or scientific concepts or procedures in a simple, clear, and organized fashion for non-experts; and (2) the ability to create visually effective documents. This is rather vague, though, so here are some tips that go a level deeper.

Sample Selection

One of our most memorable applicants submitted a chapter from her in-progress science fiction novel as a writing sample. Unfortunately, it was a very confusing story, and she failed to provide us with additional samples that might still have won us over.

As another example, a PhD scientist submitted a journal article he had published, but because it was filled with so much advanced scientific jargon, we could not tell if he was capable of distilling it for a non-technical audience. Had he submitted samples that convinced us otherwise, we may well have scheduled a phone screen with him.

These anecdotes illustrate a key point, which is to select samples that are closely aligned with the position you're applying for. If the position involves writing content for a task-based online help system, include samples that demonstrate your ability to write clear, user-friendly help procedures. If you only wrote procedures for print documentation, consider repackaging them as an online help system to show how you're capable of working with that kind of technology. You could download a trial version of a help authoring tool to do this.

Moreover, be sure you actually wrote a significant portion of your sample and be ready to explain the outcomes you achieved. Smart hiring managers know how easy it is for writers to exaggerate their contribution to a sample. Indeed, my team and I discovered multiple cases where an applicant played a minor role in samples they submitted.

Sample Summary

Consider adding a summary of your writing sample to set the context for it. Your summary could include the target audience, the problem it addressed, and a statement of any modifications you made (such as name changes or redactions) to suit the application process. As a hiring manager, I appreciated that kind of context, not least because it saved me time in needing to inquire further about it during interviews. The applicants who did this always set themselves apart from their peers.

Online Samples

Online samples and portfolios were rarer than I expected, which meant that anyone who submitted one was memorable. I would encourage you to assemble an online portfolio if you can, even if all you do is post print samples to it. So much technical writing these days occurs in the Web medium, and that trend is showing no signs of letting up.

You have many options here. It is easy to set up a free online portfolio using Wordpress.org. You can also link samples to your LinkedIn profile, post presentations to SlideShare (slideshare.net), publish instructional videos on YouTube, or upload documents to Issuu (issuu.com), which can then be easily embedded on a Web page for interactive use.

Organization and Design

To expand on my point above, be sure to use good organization and visual design. I was surprised at how many samples that failed in this. A particularly memorable one was a user guide on how to play tic-tac-toe. While it was perhaps a decent way to create an artificial sample to demonstrate one's skills, the writing was unclear and disorganized, the steps were not presented consistently, and the pictures were grainy and confusing.

It is perfectly acceptable if your sample is based on a pre-existing template that you did not create. However, be prepared to speak honestly about that and realize that other applicants may upstage you on that point. The more of a role you played in the organization and design of your sample, the more competitive you will be.

Common Difficulties

Some technical writers work in top-secret jobs, or are under a non-disclosure agreement and therefore can't share what they've written from a past job. There are several ways to work around this. In short, you can request permission, redact the intellectual property, volunteer for a non-profit project, update a homework assignment from school, or create something artificial. See "When Your Portfolio's Content is Proprietary" by Synergistech for more ideas. The key is to be honest and knowledgeable about the context of the sample—and to explain how you might improve it with the proper resources.

Conclusion: The Whole Package

As we evaluated one application package after another, my team and I frequently encountered gaps or inconsistencies that worked against an applicant's success. For example, we saw LinkedIn profiles that looked highly polished, but when we received a resume, we found bad design, excessive jargon, or confusing language. Or the resume was perfection itself, but the writing samples were abstruse, disorganized, and plagued with errors and inconsistencies.

In the end, we came to see how important it is for job seekers to build cohesion throughout their application package. The most competitive applicants maintained a consistent level of quality across their LinkedIn profile, resume, writing samples, blog or online portfolio, cover letter, homework assignment, interviews, and anything else that was written or spoken during the hiring process. Building that level of quality and cohesion takes time and practice, but it's entirely doable, and it's a sure way to boost your confidence as you head into your interviews, ready to impress.

RICHARD RABIL JR. *is a principal technical writer at Oracle. He has over 10 years of technical communication experience and holds a master's degree in Technical Communication and Rhetoric from Texas Tech University. You can follow him on Twitter at* @rrabil.

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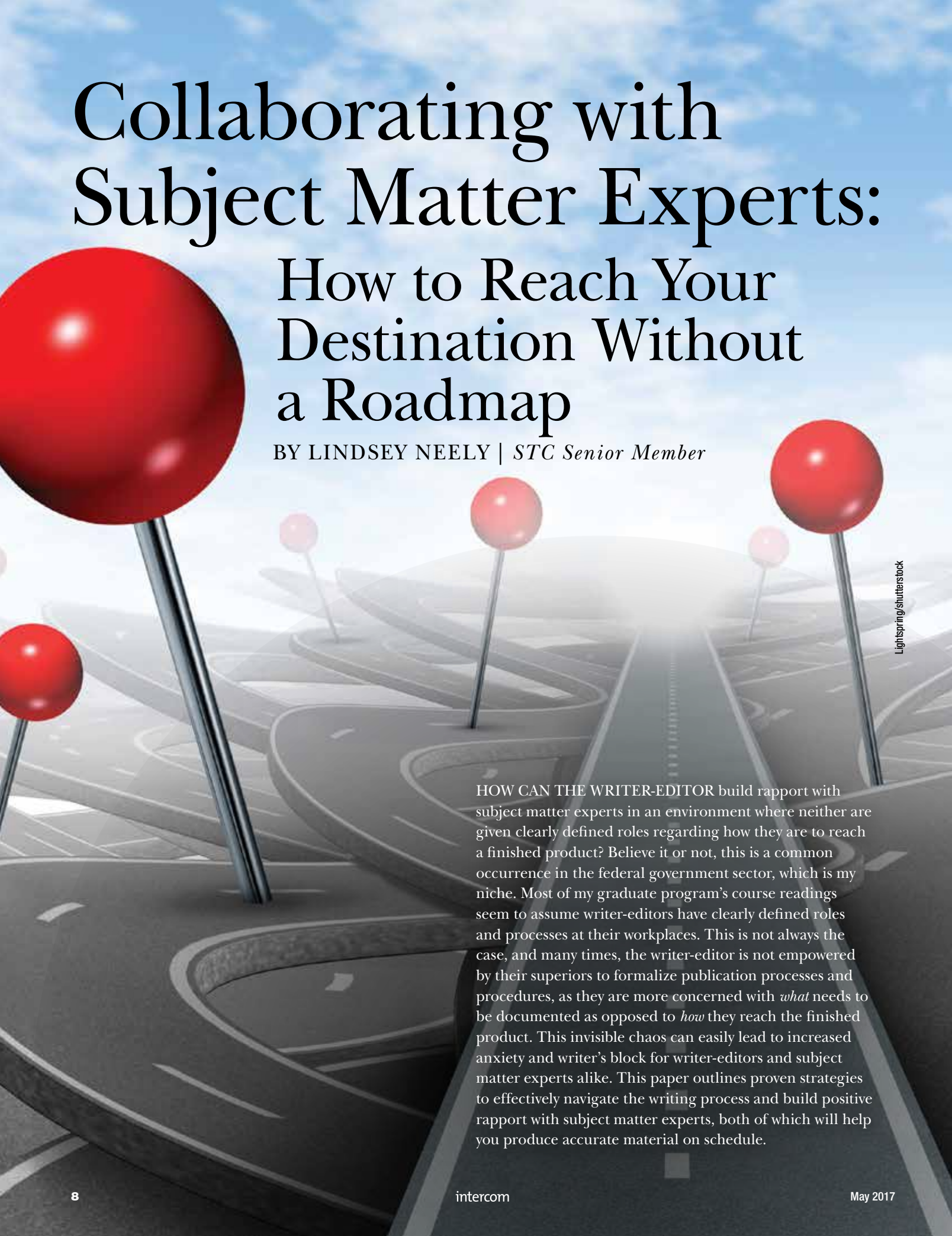
Collaborating with Subject Matter Experts:

How to Reach Your Destination Without a Roadmap

BY LINDSEY NEELY | *STC Senior Member*



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HOW CAN THE WRITER-EDITOR build rapport with subject matter experts in an environment where neither are given clearly defined roles regarding how they are to reach a finished product? Believe it or not, this is a common occurrence in the federal government sector, which is my niche. Most of my graduate program's course readings seem to assume writer-editors have clearly defined roles and processes at their workplaces. This is not always the case, and many times, the writer-editor is not empowered by their superiors to formalize publication processes and procedures, as they are more concerned with *what* needs to be documented as opposed to *how* they reach the finished product. This invisible chaos can easily lead to increased anxiety and writer's block for writer-editors and subject matter experts alike. This paper outlines proven strategies to effectively navigate the writing process and build positive rapport with subject matter experts, both of which will help you produce accurate material on schedule.

The Worst That Could Happen

Let's say things aren't going well with your subject matter expert—for whatever reason. You do the best you can and are mostly satisfied with the end product. The research you did on your own didn't quite hit the mark your supervisor was hoping for because it wasn't tailored to your company's requirements and processes. The result is an inaccurate document and/or a missed deadline. Now you are costing your company additional time and resources, when you really should have closed this project out and been focused on a new one. Of course, this is assuming your supervisor caught the content errors.

What if—

- because you didn't have great input from your subject matter expert, crucial information was missing or erroneous?
- this document involved instructions regarding heavy equipment or hazardous materials?
- error or ambiguity in the document you worked on contributed to someone's death?

That is a lot to worry about—morally, ethically, and financially. Now that I have stopped short of threatening you with jail time, let's explore how to avoid these worst-case scenarios.

Should I Call You or Wait for You to Call Me?

What does your boss expect of you? This is a great place to start, but don't expect them to be specific. You may hear that they want a standard operating procedure on how employees check equipment out of your office. If you're lucky, you will also get a due date and the name of a subject matter expert you can use as a resource. Time to start jotting your thoughts down, beginning with all the questions you can think of. The next logical question is: How do I reach out to this person and get the information I need?

When it comes to writing, it's always better to take the initiative and reach out to another party rather than to wait for them to contact you; you could wait weeks or months as your subject matter expert hopes you forget about them and decide to write the document yourself. If meeting with your subject matter expert in person is not feasible, you will need to weigh the pros and cons of phone calls, email, and virtual meetings. If you anticipate the possibility of your tone being misconstrued, I suggest phone calls or virtual meetings. Of course, if you want a paper trail, this may not be the best option.

If you both work at the same site, it would behoove you to meet with your subject matter expert face-to-face. This is my forte and where I rack up the most rapport-building points. Psychology experts estimate that a large percentage (numbers vary and depend on which study you read) of our communication is non-verbal, and this is why it's so easy to misconstrue a person's tone over email and—occasionally—the phone. The best choice is to stop by the subject matter expert's office, introduce yourself, and tell them you are looking forward to working with them to create the document. If they have time to speak with you for a few minutes, this is a great opportunity to ask such questions as:

- "How long have you been with (the company/agency)?"
- "Have you worked on developing this type of documentation before?"
- "Do you like to write?"
- "Have you thought about how you'd like to collaborate so we can have a finished product by (state the specific or general due date you were given)?"
- "It was good talking to you. I'll send you an email so we can set up a time to talk in more detail. What days and times usually work best for you?"

At this point, your subject matter expert may start to look annoyed. Aren't you glad you decided to meet face-to-face? This is going to help you gauge if you need to wrap up your introductory meeting or if you can dig deeper, and picking up on cues and learning how to craft these conversations will get easier the more you do it, as will your comfort level with this type of interaction.

As your conversations with the subject matter expert progress, you will invariably come to a fork in the road: Who's going to write this thing?

Who's Really the Writer Here?

Who actually writes the document—the subject matter expert or the writer-editor, who often has minimal knowledge of the topic? Be forewarned that you will likely hear, "You were hired to be the writer… Your title is 'Technical *Writer*'… Why do you want me to write this when you are the writer?" You can avoid an argument by steering the conversation toward discussing some of the tasks involved in writing, emphasizing you need the subject matter expert's input to create the required document. As a writer-editor who has enjoyed the freedom to tailor my approach to accommodate different types of collaborators, I present the following as the go-to strategies I've developed over the past decade.

Subject Matter Expert Writes It (Mostly) All

This is the subject matter expert who is confident writing and is willing to write a first draft with the understanding that you will edit it and have follow-up questions. In this situation, it is helpful to provide your subject matter expert with a template for them to work in, unless they decline. In this case, they will likely email you a Word document that you may be stuck

pulling information out of and plugging into your template, only to find chunks of information are missing. This is a fantastic position to be in because now you have a starting point to ask questions and use your skills as a writer-editor, which also shows your added value to the company.

This type of collaboration usually requires minimal topic research from you.

Subject Matter Expert is Motivated, Lacks Confidence

Your subject matter expert seemed motivated until you try to divvy up tasks between the two of you, at which point they seem to shut down. This is where reading body language is indispensable and your line of questioning and tailoring your approach will depend largely on how they react, both verbally and non-verbally, to what you say. Be cautious not to come across as condescending, so be aware of your tone and body language as well.

I have found several ways to pull information out of these folks. I let them know that I have a template that takes some of the guesswork out of what we need to write. We discuss what I know about the topic and I ask if they have any good resources, and they almost always talk about their job duties. They start to feel more comfortable, and you can decide if you should proceed with an informal interview, schedule a formal interview, ask them to jot down some key points or to email you their thoughts on the topic. The keys here are to make them feel comfortable with you and also to follow up with them as deadlines approach. Often, these subject matter experts don't think they write well and are worried they are going to be judged on their perceived shortcoming.

This type of collaboration will require research from you to help spark their ideas and writing. Having a broad overview of the topic you are writing about will help guide your interview skills and keep you on task.

Subject Matter Expert Is Just Here to Say Yes or No

Some subject matter experts just don't want to write and don't want to give you the information you need. This is a tough situation for any writer-editor to be in, but one that will help you grow as a writer, interviewer, and researcher.

In this situation, you will do most of the work yourself, including more research than with the other types of collaboration. It is advisable to get input from other coworkers, too, who can serve as information resources, can guide you to other resources, and may be able to give you tips on how to obtain the information you need from your assigned subject matter expert.

You may need to talk to their supervisor. While this may help improve production on the current project, it may backfire in the long run if you have to work with this individual again. The key here is to build strong working relationships with your subject matter experts, and that can take weeks, months, or even years. Sometimes it never happens; you want to minimize the chances that it will be your fault. Every situation is different, and the judgment call is yours.

Conclusion

Excellent working relationships and documentation cannot eliminate risk of death, injury, damage to property, or prevent mistakes, but they can greatly reduce the likelihood of occurrence. A healthy working relationship includes—but is not limited to—feeling comfortable asking questions, admitting when you don't know the answer, and brainstorming and working collaboratively to find answers. Favorable, trusting working relationships yield better, more accurate documents and aid in maximizing time all parties spend on the project. The collaboration strategies described in this article compose the roadmap that will get you to your destination on time, on budget, and with as few wrong turns as possible.

LINDSEY NEELY (WriterLindseyNeely@gmail.com) *has nine years' experience as a technical writer and editor for 14 federal agencies/contractors and currently works on Capitol Hill. She holds a BS in psychology from Virginia Tech, an MS in management from Troy University, and will finish her Master of Technical Communication degree with Utah State University this fall. She believes the only thing better than a well-written document is her dog, although her cat begs to differ.*

FURTHER READING

Overcoming Writer's Block

"Other Strategies for Getting Over Writer's Block." Purdue Online Writing Lab, *https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/567/02/*

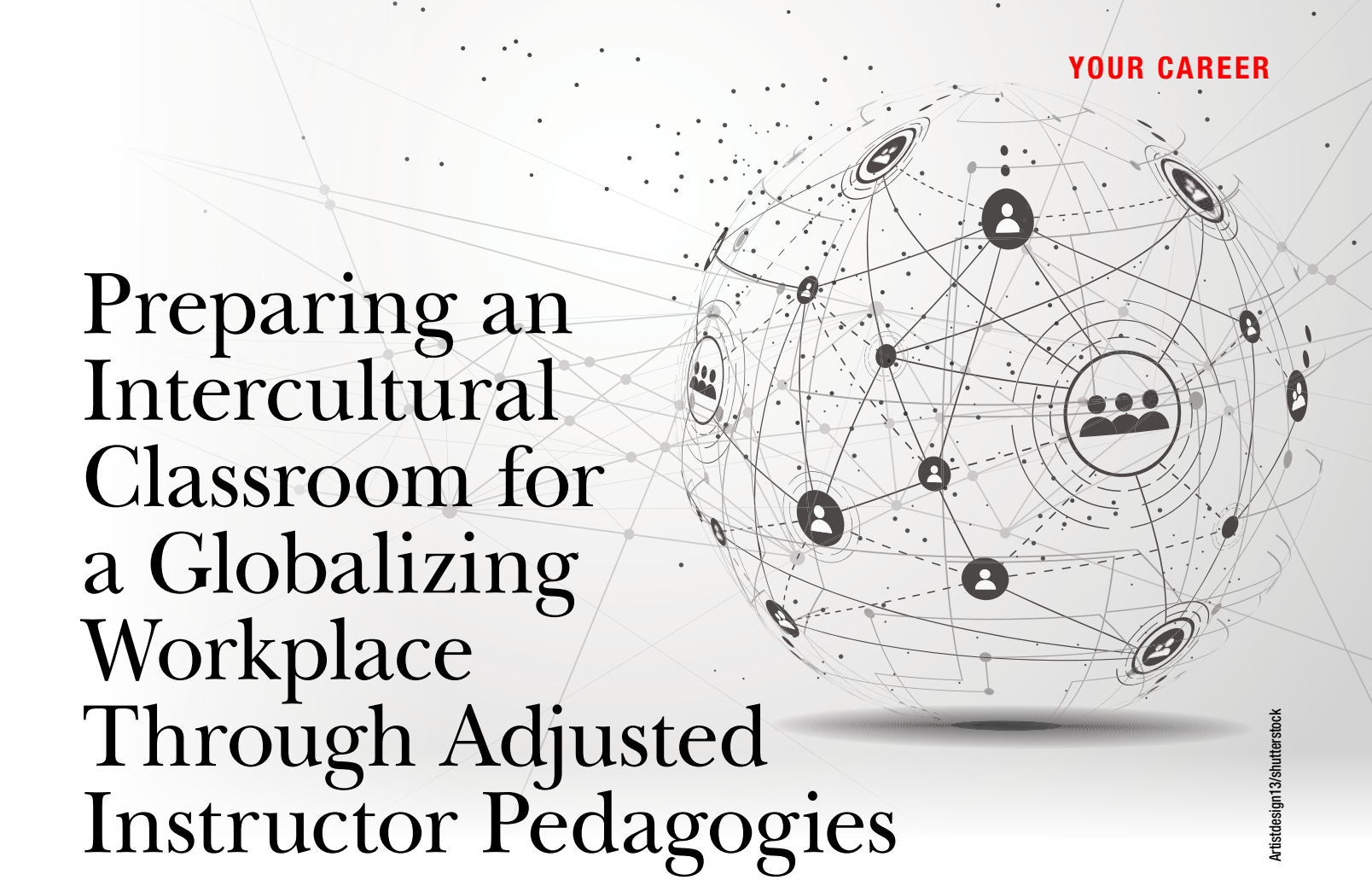
Understanding Body Language in the Workplace

"Body Language in the Workplace: Dos and Don'ts." *The Washington Post*, *https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/capitalbusiness/body-language-in-the-workplace-dos-and-donts/2012/02/24/gIQAkDpMcR_gallery.html?utm_term=.91ca14871452*

Improving Workplace Relationships

"13 Options to Improve Your Work Relationships." Beverly D. Flaxington, *Psychology Today*, *https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/understand-other-people/201212/13-options-improve-your-work-relationships*

"How To Improve Your Relationships At Work." Nicole Liloia, *Forbes*, *https://www.forbes.com/sites/womensmedia/2014/12/01 how-to-improve-your-relationships-at-work/#33c4427547a2*



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Preparing an Intercultural Classroom for a Globalizing Workplace Through Adjusted Instructor Pedagogies

By TIFFANY PRICE

ADVANCEMENTS NECESSARY for the developing technical communication classroom have been a topic of interest for many years now. As technology continues to take shape, the teaching techniques designed for a technical communication classroom change to adhere to the evolving technologies available. However, one realm of the changing technical communication classroom is linked specifically to the existing and growing diversity of the classroom, and the globalization of the workplace. In light of these two cultural areas of growth, there is a call for instructors in technical communication classrooms to not only meet the educational needs of the culturally diverse students, but to ensure that they are all prepared for a globalizing workplace. Instructors need to adjust pedagogical approaches to prepare each student for the globalization of the workplace by evaluating the history of education, utilizing plain language in and out of the classroom, and analyzing the expected future of technological advances.

History of Education

An effective way to manage pedagogical approaches in an intercultural classroom is to examine how education has developed and how the history of education affects the current classroom according to its evolutionary characteristics. One of the most significant measures of education is done through examining the use of textbooks. According to Longo (2000), "textbooks are cultural artifacts participating in knowledge/power systems" (24). The use of textbooks in the classroom derives from centuries ago, but was mainly identified as a significant means of learning beginning in the 17th century. The use of textbooks eventually led to the theory of standardized curriculum, which can attest to the academic drive of the 21st century (Longo 2000).

Through synthesizing the history of education and the importance of textbooks in our educational system, instructors can determine the appropriate use of textbooks in a culturally diverse technical communication classroom. Barker and Matveeva (2006) call for instructors to consider textbooks through the lens of awareness, information, and practice. Through examining the history of education, the use of textbooks, and the current obligation to gear textbook material to a culturally diverse classroom, technical communication instructors need to examine the material presented in the textbook to ensure they are meeting the educational needs of all students, no matter their cultural background.

Plain Language

Another trending topic in technical communication classrooms is that of plain language. Jones et al. define plain language as "publicly distributed information [communicated] in a 'clear, concise, well organized' manner" (2012). However, this particular theory of communicating in the most easily understood manner can change according to the audience. An intercultural classroom should be introduced to the concept of plain language, and the theory of using plain language should be incorporated in the instructor's pedagogical approach designed to reach the educational needs of the culturally diverse technical communication classroom. Using plain language in the classroom will teach students the importance of using plain language in the globalizing workplace.

Jones et al. (2012) suggest that the terms "plain language" and "plain talk" are interchangeable, and through this understanding of communicating simply to the audience in a manner that will effectively achieve the rhetorically intended message, instructors can implement such theories in culturally diverse classrooms to accomplish the same goal. However, the use of plain language implemented in the lessons of a culturally diverse technical communication classroom can also be taught to adequately prepare all students of that classroom for a globalizing workplace. Students need to be prepared for the cultural diversity that exists outside of the classroom, and as the instructor strives to communicate effectively through the use of plain language, they can also teach the replicated theory for students to understand and use outside the classroom.

Future of Technology

The future of technology is another aspect of technical communication to consider while preparing an intercultural classroom for the globalizing workplace. Although there are many focuses that are born from such a broad topic, the future of virtual offices will be the primary means of concentration for technical advancements that match a globalizing workplace. "Now, with technologies such as company email systems and corporate intranets, the office has expanded to include co-workers from various national and cultural backgrounds and who are stationed in various locations around the globe" (St.Amant 2000).

Technical communication instructors not only have to adjust their pedagogical approaches when introduced to a culturally diverse classroom, but they also have to provide each student with the means of interacting in a globalizing workplace through the use of technological advancements. These technological advancements will continue to evolve, but accompanying that evolution is an ever-present culturally diverse representation of co-workers and colleagues.

Conclusion

The current atmosphere of the technical communication classroom is changing and evolving due to the incorporation of intercultural student representation. This cultural shift in the classroom is also being replicated in the globalizing workplace. Therefore, the technical communication instructor is not only called to teach an intercultural classroom in a way that meets the educational needs of the culturally diverse group, but also to prepare students to communicate effectively in a globalizing workplace. Adjustments to instructor pedagogies can be made when examining the history of education while allowing the past to drive the present (especially surrounding textbook use), using plain language to communicate with the class while simultaneously teaching students to effectively communicate with the use of plain language, and acknowledging the technological advancements that are currently molding the globalizing workplace while preparing students for a change in the traditional office environment.

TIFFANY PRICE *is celebrating her fourth term of teaching English Composition 1 through University of the People, a strictly online university that has recently partnered with UC Berkeley. Tiffany is able to apply her focus on the intercultural classroom, developed through her graduate studies in Technical and Professional Communications at East Carolina University, as she teaches students in an online environment that extends to over 200 different countries. In unison with attaining a certificate in Professional Communication through East Carolina University, Tiffany also achieved a certificate in Multicultural and Transnational Literatures. Tiffany and her husband have just recently settled in Ann Arbor, Michigan after a two-year residency in Manchester, England.*

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Longo, Bernadette. 2000. *Spurious Coin: A History of Science, Management, and Technical Writing.* New York: State University of New York Press.

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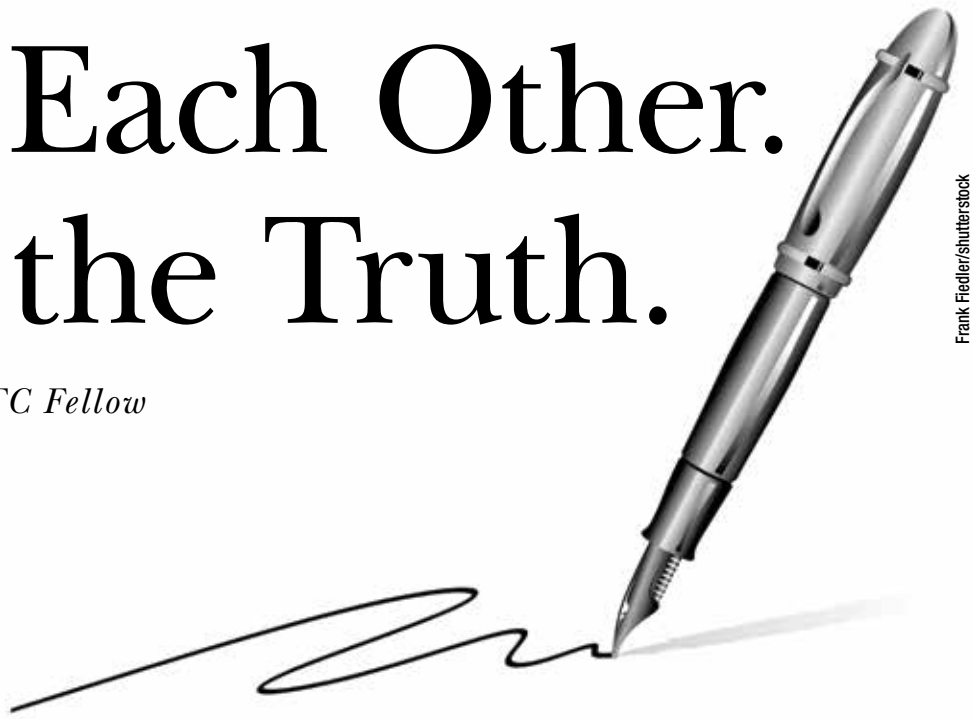
Serve the Profession. Serve Each Other. Serve the Truth.



Frank Fiedler/shutterstock

By LARRY KUNZ | *STC Fellow*

These are remarks Larry Kunz made earlier this year at the STC Carolina Chapter's 50th anniversary celebration, reprinted with permission as a salute, and an encouragement, to everyone in the technical communication profession.

FIFTY YEARS AGO our forebears brought forth a new organization, dedicated to promoting and cultivating the profession of technical communication in this area. It's a testament to their vision that this idea—cultivating the profession of technical communication—sounds perfectly normal to us today. In 1967 it was crazy talk: technical writers were often an afterthought, subservient to the engineers and scientists they worked with. At universities, technical writing, when it was taught at all, was usually a little enclave within the English department.

The Founding Members

When I got here in 1983, I got to know three of our chapter's founding members. Dr. Edmund Dandridge, professor of English at NC State University, made a name for himself as a teacher and researcher.

Richard Russell—Dick Russell—retired from IBM just about when I arrived. A whole generation of technical writers regarded Dick Russell as a trailblazer and a mentor.

Austin Farrell without a doubt was the chapter's father figure. I don't think he actually smoked, but I can picture him wearing a cardigan sweater, holding a pipe in his hand, offering fatherly advice and wisdom to the people who followed him as leaders in the chapter.

I was privileged to know these founding members, but here's what I want you to know about them: they were pretty much the same as you. They believed that technical writers, designers, illustrators, and managers should be recognized as professionals—just like the engineers and scientists they worked with. They believed in sharing knowledge and helping people grow in their careers.

The Legacy They Started

Fifty years later, we look on the legacy they started, the legacy that you all have helped build. I'm grateful and proud that the Carolina Chapter has always had strong programs and events, strong competitions, and, of course, strong people.

I keep coming back to the people. If this chapter has a proud history it's because of its people. Because of all of you who cared. You cared about the profession. You cared about each other. You cared enough to share your skills and knowledge, to mentor, to celebrate each other's achievements.

You cared. You *served*.

Even though I said we're not subservient, our profession really is built on service. We serve our audience—the people who use the information we create. Service is the heart of what we do as technical communicators.

Some of you were active in the chapter many years ago. Some of you are longtime members and have played vital roles. Some of you are relatively new: your hard work, your inspiration, your caring and serving will write the history of our next 50 years.

So, from today onward, how will we serve our profession?

Serving Our Profession and Each Other

Our profession continues to evolve. Our audiences have new expectations for information that's tailored to them and is easy to find.

Thanks to Jeana Routh for tweeting this photo

Larry Kunz delivering remarks at 50th anniversary celebration

Our content needs to adapt to new media. A year ago, Pokemon Go took the world by storm. A year from now, you might be creating content for augmented reality.

Our working conditions are changing. Fifty years ago, everyone worked for a single company. Today, like as not, you're a freelancer or a contractor. Wherever you work, you're part of a global network.

To keep up with these changes, to meet the challenges they bring, we'll need to work together, sharing our knowledge and our mutual support.

Why did Austin Farrell offer advice to chapter leaders? It was his way of serving the profession and serving its people.

Why did you give presentations, judge in competitions, serve as treasurer, communications director, president? You were serving the profession, and its people.

As we head together into the future, we need to keep serving the profession. We need to keep serving each other.

Finally, we need to serve the truth. Three or four years ago I never imagined I'd have to say this. Then came fake news. Then came people insisting that real news is fake. Then came "alternative facts."

Serving the Truth

Why do we need to serve the truth? Why does it matter?

Truth matters because our profession depends on there being a consensus about what's true and what's not. You can write a System Setup Guide because there are accepted best practices for setting up the system. You can write a scientific report because there's accurate and trustworthy data.

Truth matters because the world can really use some critical thinking right now, and as technical communicators we have critical thinking in our DNA. Just because the chief engineer or the head of marketing tells you something, you don't take it at face value. You ask whether it makes sense for your audience, for the people you serve. Will it help my audience reach their objective? Will it give them a better handle on the truth?

In today's world, the truth is shrinking. The ground of commonly held truth on which we stand is melting away faster than the ice caps. If that common ground disappears, if you and I and our fellow citizens don't share consensus about what's real and what's true, we can't have a conversation about what anything means or about choosing the best way forward.

Without that common ground, without that conversation, we—all the people—have nothing left to hold us together. We lose the foundation for our (little R) republican form of government.

When we the people can't agree on what truth is, then truth becomes whatever the people in power say it is.

Fifty Years From Now

Fifty years from now, I hope, someone will stand here again and look back on the history of the Carolina Chapter. What will they see? Will they honor a tradition of people who served the profession, who served each other, and who served the truth? People who helped preserve the truth so that they, and those around them, would remain free?

It's been my honor and privilege to be affiliated with the Carolina Chapter for the last 34 years. I look forward to being part of this community for a long time to come.

Together let's serve the profession. Let's serve each other. Let's serve the truth. For 50 years we've been doing it well. Let's do it now with all our hearts.

LARRY KUNZ *(*lk81924@gmail.com*) is a technical communication professional with more than 30 years' experience. He works as a lead technical writer for Extreme Networks, creating customer documentation for networking hardware and the software that runs it. He also teaches a course in project management in the Technical Communication certificate program at Duke University.*

2017–2018 President Alyssa Fox's Annual Business Meeting Remarks

I'M THRILLED and honored to have been elected STC Vice President and to start the year as STC President. This is such an invigorating time for technical communicators. Over the next several years, I believe we will see a profound change in the way businesses view our role, and in the contributions we make to business success.

Technological change is driving the pressure on businesses and organizations to innovate more than ever before. Customer and market behaviors are re-defining entire industries and changing the relationships between businesses and their customers.

In the midst of all this change, businesses must think differently about information and how people consume content. Customers no longer want to just hear promotional advertising—they want to be informed and to get real value from each and every communication they receive. They want content that helps them solve their problems. And that's the very content that we create.

The impact that technical communicators have as a professional community continues to become more powerful, and the understanding of how to bring technical content together with marketing, sales, support, and other parts of the business will be an essential part of business strategy. No longer are we "documenting products in the corner." We are helping solve our customers' problems. And we're doing that by shaping and delivering the content that shows them how we can make their lives easier. By building and promoting compelling content, we raise our visibility in our organizations and show the value we add in building these strong customer relationships. Technical communicators have a lot to offer, and the time to establish our position as a central element of the customer experience is now.

STC is dedicated to enabling our members to develop and cultivate the skills and knowledge to take full advantage of these changes. STC exists to help you learn, network, and grow. In the future, it's imperative to show business managers how to better partner with technical communicators like us to improve every interaction with their customers and their markets.

This is a transformative time for all of us, which makes this a transformative time for STC. We have a new CEO. We have a new board. We have a new and growing certification program. And we have a renewed ambition for positioning STC as *the* voice of technical communication.

So thank you. Thank you for your faith in this board, and your faith in the staff. Thank you for the countless hours you put in to help our society, our discipline, and our members. Seth Mattison talked in his opening keynote at the Summit about our relationships. The business and personal relationships we form through STC are the backbone of the Society. I'm excited to work with you to continue to build a society that helps all of us connect not only to each other, but to our businesses, our organizations, and our customers in increasingly relevant and impactful ways.

President's Award

THE PRESIDENT'S AWARD honors those who have made distinguished contributions to the profession of technical communication or the Society. The President's Award is awarded solely at the discretion of the President, who announces the names of the recipients during the opening session of the STC Summit. This year, Adriane Hunt, 2016–2017 President, is pleased to announce Ben Woelk as the 2017 President's Award winner.

Ben Woelk's citation reads: For outstanding contributions to STC in various roles, including Rochester Chapter Co-Vice President, Scholarship Committee Chair, former Director on the STC Board, Spectrum Conference Co-Chair, STC *Notebook* blog contributor, *Intercom* guest editor, and CPTC and introverted leadership study groups coordinator. Your dedication to the technical communication profession and your approach to excellence represents STC at its finest.

Congratulations to Ben!

International Summit Awards

IN 2016, the Society for Technical Communication sponsored international competitions through which technical communicators had the opportunity to receive recognition for their work. STC chapters hold preliminary competitions from which Excellence and Distinguished Award winners advance to the international level. Each entry is judged against criteria that measure the degree of technical content, achievement of purpose, and technical execution, whether online or in printed deliverable. An entry must win an Award of Excellence or Distinguished Technical Communication at the chapter/regional level to qualify for submission to STC's International Summit Awards (ISA) competition. Special thanks to Kit Brown-Hoekstra, Chair of the International Summit Awards Committee, and committee members Elizabeth Bailey, Sally Henschel, and Pamela Sarantos.

Below are the ISA entries that received Distinguished awards:

Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health
Contributors: E. Andrew Jessup, Richard S. Straw, Valerie Garner, August J. Gering

KVH Mini-VSAT Broadband Crew Training Series
Contributor: Mike Nelson

Medidata Developer Central
Contributors: Charles Miller, Lelia Livadas, Nitza Hauser

RetinaVue 100 Imager Startup Guide
Contributor: Sandra Craig, Kenneth Reid

SAS(R) Event Stream Processing 4.2 Documentation
Contributors: Michael Harvey, Carolyn Sutton, Eric Harmeling

SAS(R) Mobile BI 8.1 for iPad and iPhone: Help
Contributors: Karen Mobley, Brad Kellam

Community Achievement Awards

EACH YEAR, the Community Achievement Awards recognize a SIG, professional, or student chapter's outstanding accomplishments in achieving the Society's goals through a wide range of programs and activities. Communities are awarded Platinum, Gold, Silver, and Bronze awards. The Community of the Year is chosen from among the Platinum Communities (previously Communities of Distinction) and announced at the STC Summit.

This year's Community of the Year is the Chicago Chapter. The citation reads: For a truly impressive 2016 Community Achievement Award year, packed with many strong programs, including your continued growth and success with the annual Chicago eLearning & Technology Showcase. STC Chicago is a solid example of a successful STC chapter that fosters communication, education, and outreach in the technical communication profession.

This year, a Most Improved Community was also selected. The Most Improved Community is given to the community that "stepped up their game" the most from one year to the next, based on their applications for the Community Achievement Award (CAA).

This year's Most Improved Community is the San Diego Chapter. The citation reads: For a 2016 Community Achievement Award year that showed an impressive increase in outreach activities and education programs. STC San Diego clearly demonstrates a strong dedication to its membership and the technical communication community.

Congratulations to the Chicago and San Diego Chapters and their members!

Context, Culture, and Usability

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BY KIRK ST.AMANT | *STC Fellow*

USABILITY IS ABOUT CONTEXT. If you know where someone performs a process, you can develop materials for that setting. The idea is conforming content to context to make that content easy to use. Today's global economy complicates this situation by increasing the contexts where individuals use products. Technical communicators can address this challenge by identifying central factors affecting usability in different settings.

Objectives, Contexts, and Use

Individuals use products to achieve specific objectives (e.g., using a hammer to pound a nail). This *objective of use* means we assess usability based on how well a product lets us achieve our objective for using it. However, the location where processes take place can vary from person to person. These differences can affect the perceived usability of a product.

Consider the process of changing a tire. The objective is to replace one tire (a flat) with another (a spare). The size of the space where you perform this process affects what you can do (e.g., how you can apply leverage to use a tire iron to loosen nuts or a lever to work a jack). Likewise, the amount of light in that setting affects what you can see and thus do in that location. In this case, technical instructions for changing a tire need to be designed to address such factors for them to be usable in that setting. This relationship between content (the information individuals can use) and contexts (where they use that content) determines what constitutes the usable design—or usability—of a product.

Variables, Context, and Use

Designing for such *context of use* involves identifying the factors affecting how we use materials in an environment. These *variables of use* can differ from setting to setting, but they are often connected to our past experiences and related expectations.

The idea works as follows: The more you perform a task in a setting, the more you view that setting as the context in which you will attempt to achieve a particular objective. If, for example, every time I've had to change a tire it was in an open, well-lit, and quiet space, I would consider that setting the standard context for performing that process. The variables of use are those factors I expect to be in that setting based on my prior experiences changing a tire, and I will consider materials designed to meet these contextual-expectations as more usable. Past experiences of use thus dictate future expectations of usability.

Location, Expectation, and Use

If you own a car, where do you expect to drive it? What conditions are present in those contexts, and how might they limit what you can do when you need to change a tire? These factors can vary from nation to nation and can affect the experience-based expectations individuals have for a context of use. Similarly, the tools that come "standard" with a car are based on experiences, and they affect expectations of what one can and cannot do based on the tools one expects to use. So do societal factors—such as the laws dictating where and when one can change a tire—and cultural norms dictating who may perform this action, when, and how. All these aspects can differ from nation to nation, and each can affect context-based expectations of usability.

This column examines different aspects of technical communication in global contexts. Email the editor at stamantk@ecu.edu.

The problem is certain variables might be easier to identify than others. For example, information on the kinds and conditions of roads in a nation can be easy to locate via data on a nation's climate, geography, and infrastructure (see, for example nation-specific entries found online at *https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/*). Knowing who can and cannot change a tire according to societal convention, however, requires a broader understanding of culture and its complexities. Technical communicators need to consider all of these factors when researching the contexts of use in different nations. A modified version of schema theory can help technical communicators with this process.

Schemas, Characteristics, and Expectations

Schemas encompass the mental models we have for what something should look like. When, for example, I say the word "garage," a particular visual pops to mind. That visual is the ideal version of what I think a garage should look like. This ideal is comprised of different elements–or characteristics–I expect to be present for me to consider a location to be a garage. These factors include

- *Who* I expect to be there to perform certain activities (e.g., mechanics who change a tire)
- *What* items I expect to be present in that setting (e.g., a tire iron and jack for changing a tire)
- *How* I expect to get items into that context (e.g., how I drop my car off for servicing)
- *How* I expect to get items out of that context (e.g., how I leave with my car after servicing)

These factors shape my expectations of what I can and cannot do in a given setting.

Experience is key to these associations. The more I encounter certain factors/characteristics in a context, the more I expect them to be present. Similarly, the more I see certain activities done in a certain way in that setting, the more I expect that activity to take place–in that way–in that setting. So, if I know where the members of a culture expect to undertake an objective (e.g., change a tire), I know what characteristics to look for to determine what can and cannot be done, by whom, with what, and how in that setting.

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Using these characteristics as a guide, I can do research to map—or identify—the variables the members of a culture associate with usability in that context.

Methods, Maps, and Models

Understanding the usability expectations of another culture requires technical communicators to collect data directly from the members of that culture. Effective methods for such data collection include interviews of individuals from a culture and focus groups comprised of members of that culture. In both cases, technical communicators need to ask the members of a culture the following questions:

- **Objective:** What are you trying to do/achieve?
- **Setting:** Where will you be when you perform this process?
- **Objects:** What items will you use to perform this activity? Which of these items will be in that setting?
- **Individuals:** Who is usually in this setting, and does that person help with the activity? (If so, how/what do they do?)
- **Access:** How did you enter/get to this setting? If you need help or have questions while performing this activity, how do you get such help/answers?
- **Exits:** When performing this process, do you record information to share it with others outside of that setting? If so, with whom and how do you share this information? How do you move from one place to another when you are done with an activity?

Technical communicators can use the answers to these questions to determine:

- *Where* the members of a culture perform a given activity connected to a particular objective (context)
- *Who* is expected to be in that context and *what* activities they are expected to perform
- *What* items are individuals in that context are expected to use
- *How* one gets needed materials and information into and out of that context

Technical communicators can use the resulting answers to create a model (i.e., an image) of what a particular context of use looks like to the members of a given culture. They can then use this model as a guide for developing usable materials for this context.

Once an initial context model/image is created, technical communicator should again use interviews or focus groups to have members of the related culture review this model and discuss how a particular task is performed in this setting. Technical communicators could then modify the model image based on audience feedback until it addresses the most common expectations across the widest range of users (i.e., the general cultural ideal/model of that context). This revised image/model could then serve as a reference point technical communicators could use when creating materials for certain international settings.

Addressing these factors means collecting data from the members of the actual audience/culture as directly as possible. Such interactions could be done in person (or by a proxy working in the nation being studied) or by synchronous online media such as WebEx, Skype, or Google Hangouts. In selecting a technology (or technologies) for such interactions, the technical communicator should first review the online connectivity available in different nations (e.g., bandwidth, software used, etc.) and identify media that allow access to the widest range of individuals for a prospective product.

Conclusion

As global markets for technical products grow, so does the need to address the usability expectations of different cultures. The concept of schemas can help technical communicators map cultural contexts in a way that provides insights on usability expectations in different parts of the world. Through such approaches, technical communicators can better understand and address the nuances of usability in today's global marketplace.

KIRK ST.AMANT (stamantk@ecu.edu) *is a professor and the Eunice C. Williamson Endowed Chair of technical communication at Louisiana Tech University (USA) and an adjunct professor of international health and medical communication with the University of Limerick (Ireland). His research focuses on international and intercultural aspects of usability, design, and health and medical communication.*

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An Interview with Colleen Jones of Content Science

BY SCOTT ABEL | *STC Senior Member*

IN THIS INSTALLMENT of "Meet the Change Agents," Scott Abel and content engineering maven Colleen Jones discuss how psychology, persuasion, and neuroscience play important roles in making content influential. They also talk about the coming artificial intelligence revolution and the need for organizations to develop *content intelligence*. By "refining our knowledge and practice," says the author of *Clout: The Art and Science of Influential Web Content*, technical communicators can "get it down to a science."

Scott Abel: Colleen, I'm super excited you were able to make time to speak with me today. Before we dive into the hot topics, tell our readers a little about yourself.

Colleen Jones: I'm a curious and committed content-loving geek who has worked at the intersection of content and technology for 20 years. Some people might politely call me *seasoned*. I'm especially enthusiastic right now about two things: helping large companies and organizations mature their approach to content and encouraging the advancement of content practice. By content practice, I mean methodologies and skills as well as technology and tools.

Scott: I love your company name. It speaks to me. What is Content Science? What does the company do and who does it serve?

Colleen: I named the company Content Science because "science" suggests big discovery, innovation, and paradigm shifts. At the same time, it also suggests refining our knowledge and practice, as the phrase "get it down to a science" implies. And, of course, it's all backed with data.

Content Science partners with large (midsize to enterprise) companies and organizations to innovate their approaches to content, develop effective strategies to scale those innovations, and then optimize what works well. Our services and

In the digital age, change happens quickly. This column features interviews with the movers and shakers—the folks behind new ideas, standards, methods, products, and amazing technologies that are changing the way we live and interact in our modern world. Got questions, suggestions, or feedback? Email them to *scottabel@mac.com*.

products help established companies and organizations modernize their approach to content. They're also a great fit for newer companies who want to embrace ongoing innovation.

Scott: What is a content scientist? What does a content scientist do?

Colleen: A content scientist blends analytic ability and creative problem solving into content discoveries and, ultimately, effective content strategies. A content scientist sees data and feedback about content as inspiration for innovation. Content and data scientists at Netflix, for example, played an important role in assessing the opportunity for creating groundbreaking original content. That resulted in the "content moat" strategy Netflix uses today. Talk about a repeatable and profitable strategy!

A content scientist also can help assess and optimize content through advanced techniques such as multivariate testing driven by machine learning. Again, Netflix is a famous example. Netflix tests different images to represent their content (movies, TV shows, etc.) and selects the image that correlates with more people clicking on and consuming the content.

Sometimes the content scientist is called something else, such as an analyst or strategist, but what matters is bringing scientific thinking to content decisions.

Scott: I've long believed that "content is a business asset worthy of being managed efficiently and effectively." It's central to my philosophy. And, it makes sense in a business world struggling to determine return on investment from content. At Content Science, you seem to agree with my view, but take the idea forward a bit by adding that brands have a "significant ethical responsibility" to get content right. What do you mean by this?

Colleen: Psychology, persuasion, and neuroscience play important roles in making content influential. Content is powerful, in other words. Forward-thinking brands use this power wisely. For example, Starbucks, The Home Depot, REI, Red Bull, and The Coca-Cola Company have each made concerted efforts to tell stories with substance through content—brand journalism. While you might not agree with everything all of those companies do or stand for, you have to respect their effort to engage on a deep level.

And, of course, we view content quality—getting the facts right, keeping the content updated, providing enough detail to help people make informed decisions—as an ethical responsibility, too. Whether your content is making a sale or saving lives, the right thing to do is to get the content right.

Scott: Far too often, content creators and strategists are left to their own devices, using little more than tradition, outdated rules, and psychic power to guide their efforts. At Content Science, you talk a lot about content intelligence. What do you mean by this term?

Colleen: Yes, we are big advocates for content intelligence. I'm amazed at how often content creators and strategists work in data deserts. They're surrounded by tools and people with access to data BUT have zero useful content data and insights themselves. When content strategists or creators want to propose an idea or introduce a change, they are hamstrung because they can't look to the data for insight or validation. That has to change, and we're working hard to make that change happen. We developed the term content intelligence to mean the systems that take data from many sources and turn them into actionable content insights. We encourage companies to develop a system of content intelligence that can provide constant feedback and insight—and that system is usually a combination of software, people, and process.

Scott: Gaining insights from content can be challenging. Traditional approaches to measuring value are limiting, and most companies aren't very good at capturing—and acting upon—analytics. And, when companies make the effort, they often end up counting things that don't help them improve content effectiveness. Do you see the same challenges? And, if so, what can companies that value content as an asset do to measure performance and quantify effectiveness of their content?

Colleen: Yes, we see those challenges and many related ones, such as not being able to assess content return on investment because they don't understand whether the content is effective. I find this situation happens because the approach to evaluating content is haphazard, focusing on what is easy to measure, not what matters. Companies who value content as an asset can avoid this situation by planning a content intelligence system. That can start as simply as asking "What do I want to know about my content?" and then listing what insight or data would help you answer that question. From there, you can assess what tools and data sources could supply those answers. Most often, you will need an ecosystem of tools and data sources.

To make getting those answers easier, we developed a tool called ContentWRX, which evaluates content effectiveness by collecting voice of customer data and key analytics. ContentWRX cuts the hassle out of collecting content-focused feedback reliably and repeatedly. We also can

Colleen Jones presenting her ideas

couple ContentWRX with services to assemble data from ContentWRX and other sources—Web analytics, social analytics, satisfaction data, call driver data, media mention data, and more—to create custom reports or dashboards. We do whatever we can to help organizations make content intelligence part of their content operations.

Scott: Your firm, Content Science, produces a lot of useful content. One of my favorite sources is your digital publication, *Content Science Review.* Can you tell our readers a little about the publication?

Colleen: You just paid us one of the highest compliments I could imagine—calling our own content useful. *Content Science Review* is an online magazine dedicated to advancing content practice by offering a mix of practical articles, inspirational success stories, and in-depth research and guides. The Content Science team contributes as well as many of the world's leading companies, from Alibaba to American Cancer Society to AirBnB. Our topics include content strategy, content intelligence, leadership, content operations, branding, content marketing, and much more.

Scott: In the fast-paced world in which we live and work, change is ubiquitous. Keeping up-to-date on the topics that matter and developing fresh, in-demand skills can be challenging. What is Content Science Academy and what types of educational classes are available?

Colleen: Content Science Academy is our answer to many requests at our in-person workshops to offer online training. We decided if we're going to do this, we're going to do it right. So, we created Content Science Academy as the world's only online training portal dedicated to content excellence. We offer some public courses and certifications as well as packages of certifications for large organizations who need to empower their content teams. We focus on certifications in modern content roles and skills such as content design, content engineering, content science, and content strategy.

Scott: Let's take a peek into your crystal ball. What are the major changes that will disrupt content creation, management, and delivery over the coming decade? What skills do you believe technical communication professionals should consider adding to their toolboxes in the future?

Colleen: Automation, automation, automation. Content automation is going to the next level with artificial intelligence. Every competitive CMS will have some level of natural language generation in the next year or two, for example. Technical communication and other content-related roles will evolve. We need to focus on skills that will not be replaced by machines easily, such as strategy, modeling, and planning.

Scott: Technology is advancing at a record clip. Are you excited about the possibilities? And, if so, what are the most interesting and exciting technologies that you believe will play a major role in reshaping how we craft, consume, and interact with content?

Colleen: I'm a FANATIC about the possibilities of advanced technology for content. We *finally* have technology advanced enough to bring our longtime collective vision of delivering the right content to the right customers through the right channels at the right time a reality. I'm particularly jazzed about the combination of artificial intelligence, content intelligence, and personalization to create highly dynamic and responsive customer experiences. We can provide different screens with different messages and different content offerings to different customers in real time. We can advance chatbots to assist customers on demand. We can sift through volumes of data and content quickly and automatically write useful reports, summaries, descriptions, and more. And I'm only scratching the surface. The future of content and technology is so bright, we need serious shades.

Mark Your Calendar

Organization Events Across the Globe

F.Y.I. lists information about nonprofit ventures only. Please send information to *intercom@stc.org.*

1 18-21 May
The **Association of Independent Information Professionals** (AIIP) will hold its 2017 Annual Conference, with a theme of "Resilience, Reinvention, Renewal: Pivoting for Success" at the Hampton Inn Convention Center in New Orleans, LA.
AIIP
http://www.aiip.org/Conference/
(225) 408-4400

2 12-15 June
The **Association of Proposal Management Professionals** (APMP) will hold its 2017 Annual Bid and Proposal Con 12-15 June at the New Orleans Marriott in New Orleans, LA.
APMP
http://www.apmp.org/events
membership@apmp.org

3 15-17 June
The **American Society for Indexing**'s 2017 Annual ASI – Beacon by the Bay conference will be held at the Holiday Inn by the Bay Hotel and Convention Center in Portland, ME.
ASI
https://www.asindexing.org/conference-2017/
(480) 245-6750

4 23-26 July
The **IEEE International Communication Society** will hold its annual conference, ProComm 2017, 23-26 July at the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a conference theme of "Making Waves."
IEEE PCS
http://sites.ieee.org/pcs/procomm2017/
Erin.Friess@unt.edu

5 8-10 October
The **Public Relations Society of America** will hold its 2017 International Conference 8-10 October at the Boston Marriott Copley Place in Boston, MA.
PRSA
(212) 460-1400

A Novel Approach: Authoring Docs to Novels

BY ANDREA J. WENGER | *STC Associate Fellow*

LIKE MANY WRITERS, I've dreamed of being a novelist all my life. I spent years perfecting the craft and began my publishing journey in 2014. Indie publishing is a perfect fit because I can control the process.

My technical writing skills have proven invaluable. The number one rule of technical communication—know your audience—applies equally to fiction. Too many creative writers believe that fiction is about self-expression. In fact, it's about telling a story readers want to read.

Even though the writing styles are different, both fields value clear, concise, specific language. Storytellers don't want readers to trip over the words and wake from the fictive dream. My goal is to make my stories effortless to read.

Thanks in part to the Photoshop skills I developed as a technical writer, I'm able to design my own covers. My skills don't compare to the top designers', but in some genres, my covers are comparable to those of the bestsellers.

Understanding document formatting is also a critical skill for indie authors. Properly formatted documents upload seamlessly to vendor sites. Formatting problems can delay publication, which is especially bad if you've got promos scheduled.

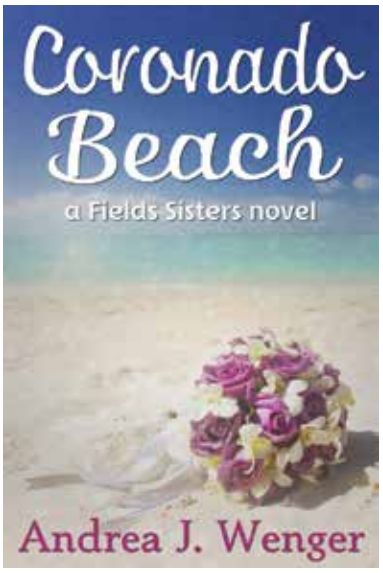
Over the next eighteen months, I'm hoping to take some marketing training that will help me in my technical writing job *and* as an indie author. Anyone studying creative writing should also study marketing. Even in traditional publishing, all but the top authors are expected to market their own books.

In addition to those fundamental skills, achieving work-life balance is important to me. My publishing schedule is rigorous: a novel or novella each month. So time management is critical. And since both of my jobs require computer use, having a fitness routine is also a priority.

Like many fiction writers, I live in my head, so taking care of my physical needs requires conscious effort. I have a stationary bike with an attached desk, and that's where I draft most of my fiction.

I write for 45 minutes first thing each morning, and start my tech comm job with my energy and creativity flowing. The morning writing session also nets me about half my day's word count. I put in a second session before dinner, then spend a couple of hours in the evening on editing and marketing.

Maintaining that schedule is key. It's easy to fall behind when you have to average 2,000 words (about eight pages) every day. Staying up late to finish is unproductive and drains your energy. Good sleep and frequent breaks during the day nourish the body and the spirit.



All the hard work and discipline are worth it when the positive reviews from fans start coming in. Knowing that your book has moved a stranger to laughter or tears is a feeling like no other.

My head is full of stories. I love words, and I love the craft of creating a fictional world. And the extra income is nice, too.

Today is the best time in history to be an author. You can go the traditional route, letting someone else shepherd the book through the process, or you can indie publish if you want to control the decision making. Many authors do a little of both.

If you've always dreamed of being an author, what are you waiting for? Your skills as a technical writer give you an advantage. Now is the time to make that dream come true.

ANDREA J. WENGER *is an STC Associate Fellow and a senior technical writer at Schneider Electric in Raleigh, NC. With more than twenty years' experience in technical communication, she specializes in grammar, style, and fitting the most information in the least space. A past president of the STC Carolina Chapter and the Women's Fiction Chapter of the Romance Writers of America, she's published about thirty novels, novellas, short stories, and collections. In her spare time, she enjoys gardening, scuba diving, and hiking active volcanoes.*

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STC Live Educational Webinar (free, sponsored, and community webinars excluded)	2
STC Online Courses	6
STC Summit Pre-Conference Courses (full day)	6
STC Summit Pre-Conference Courses (half day)	3
STC Annual Summit	8
Begin and complete a college-accredited course related to the Technical Communication field	8
Published articles that relate to any aspect of *Technical Communication* (2/article)	2
Published books publicly available on topics related to *Technical Communication* (5/book)	5
Presentations at conferences related to aspects of *Technical Communication* (2/presentation)	2
Total needed within 2 years post-certification date	**12**

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